

Climate Friendly Fruit Growing

- Top Tips



- **When planting - use Root Grow, or similar mycorrhizal fungi - also called friendly fungi.**

Why? The fungi link into the roots of the plant and act like an extension to the root system. The threads of the fungi, or filaments help the plant to take nutrients and water from the soil in exchange for carbon from the plant. Digging, hoeing, chemical fertiliser and fungicide use will all reduce the amount of friendly fungi in soil. Most plants evolved to work with fungi, so if there are few or even no fungi in the soil the plants can't benefit from this relationship.

Replacing the fungi using products like Rootgrow will help a plant to feed more easily, help it to root better and make use of the fungal network to get moisture, especially when it is dry. They are especially useful when a plant is likely to be in place for many years, like a fruit tree or bush and will help the plant establish much more successfully.

<http://www.rhs.org.uk/About-Us/Business-opportunities/Licensing/garden/Rootgrow>

<http://www.rootgrow.co.uk>

- **Don't add extra fertility when planting, unless you know that your soil is very deficient.**

Why?

You've probably seen lots of things written about adding compost and / or fertiliser to the planting hole. This can actually be a problem, as the roots have less incentive to spread to find food, and also the organic matter can break down and make soil in the hole sink, exposing the roots or burying the plant too deeply. If you know your soil is very poor, add the improvements to a much bigger area than just the tree root ball, so those roots don't just sit enjoying the plant-food close to the stem. The further you can convince the tree or bush to spread its roots, the better it will do in a drought.

- **Plant bushes and trees at the same level in the soil as they were in the pot or soil before (apart from blackcurrants).**

Why?

If you plant fruit that has been grafted on to new roots, like a fruit tree, it will start growing from the base, instead of from the new wood that is above the graft. The tree or bush will also start to make roots higher up the stem which will dry up in dry weather. Fruit bushes, although not usually

grafted, also benefit from being planted at the same level as in the pot or ground, Blackcurrants are different and grow better from being planted about 5cm more deeply.

- **Water sparingly, but deeply.**

Why?

Watering is usually necessary in the first year, unless the weather does it for you. However, if you water a little and often, the plant will grow shallow roots to reach the water that is only getting a little way down into the soil. It is far better to only water weekly or fortnightly, but deeply. After the first year, the plant should be ok, apart from during very dry weather, when you should check it for signs of moisture stress, like drooping leaves.

- **Shape the ground to help your plant.**

Why?

If the ground around the plant is completely flat, water will tend to spread out in all directions. If you create a ridge around the plant or plant it into a slight dip, the water will be concentrated around the roots, and you will need less water to do the job.

- **Mulch regularly, but carefully**

Why?

If you plant a tree or bush, and then let grass grow around it, the grass will tend to take up available water, and compete with it for nutrients. If you mulch thickly with bark chips or something similar, at least for the first 3 or 4 years, the tree or bush can establish much better. However, don't mound the mulch around the stem because this may make it start to root into the mulch or encourage rooting. Also, keep weeding out any grass that gets through the mulch before it can take hold, and remember when watering that the moisture needs to get under the mulch, so scrape it back. Or you can water into a pipe or an upside-down plastic bottle with the base cut off which can be half-planted into the hole with the tree and the water poured into it. Make sure that it is angled and levelled to direct water into the roots, not away from or below them.

- **Keep out the beasties!**

Why?

If you plant in an area with rabbits, or deer, (or sometimes even a large vole population!) your tree or bush may be dead within days as they turn it into a tasty snack. If you even think you may have a problem, buy a spiral tree-guard to go around the trunk or buy or make a mesh or plastic cage to go around the tree. Deer can reach quite high, so remember to make your guard large enough to do the job.

Also, especially with soft-fruit, unless you are really keen to encourage birds, you will want to net the fruit, otherwise as soon as it is ripe, it won't be there! A fruit cage is a worthwhile investment if you are growing a lot of fruit.

